

Abstract 411

TITLE: The Need for Integration: Using an Assisted Partner Notification Model to Curb the AIDS Epidemic

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ISSUE: While there has been increased acceptance of counseling and testing as a means to bring new cases of HIV into the treatment system earlier, partner notification of exposure to the virus largely remains an under-developed and under-utilized prevention strategy in many HIV testing programs. With illicit drug-use accounting for an increasing number of new cases of AIDS, effective and widespread use of partner notification offered through AIDS outreach services, in correctional facilities, and within treatment settings holds promise in helping to curb the epidemic.

SETTING: This analysis reports findings from a community-based study of HIV counseling, testing, and partner notification offered from a converted storefront field site on the west side of Chicago, an area characterized by poverty, crime, and high rates of drug use.

PROJECT: The project examines the efficacy of offering assisted partner notification services to active injecting drug users (IDUs) who have tested positive for the virus. Assisted partner notification is a service designed to promote, enhance, and support the ability of an HIV positive person to identify, locate and inform their partner(s) of possible shared exposure to the virus. Using street outreach to recruit IDUs not in treatment, the project recruited 911 individuals over a 3-year period for participation in counseling, testing, and partner notification when needed. Of these, 164 tested HIV positive and named 345 partners for contact.

RESULTS: Results show that assisted partner notification offers 7 advantages in curbing the spread of the virus: (1) Many IDUs need help in identifying and locating their partners, and (2) many need assistance in the notification process. Assisted partner notification (3) identifies and brings new cases into treatment. (4) It identifies high-risk persons who are HIV negative for prevention. (5) It identifies individuals with multiple risk exposures ("sandwich persons"), and (6) identifies "bridges" of exposure between social networks. (7) Assisted partner notification also helps in forecasting the spread of the epidemic.

LESSONS LEARNED: Assisted partner notification if offered through outreach services, in correctional facilities, and within treatment settings constitutes a valuable strategy to curb the AIDS epidemic. It provides a service that IDUs need and request. As a key activity in the drug treatment recovery process, assisted partner notification prepares the HIV-positive person for successful reintegration into the family and community.

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